

## **Advisory team has questions about freeway impact on Ahwatukee**

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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Despite concerns that the process of approving the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway is moving forward without its input, the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team unanimously agreed last week that topics which had been glossed over for two years should be set aside for discussion in the coming months.

The issue was something of a sore spot because two years ago the advisory team was forced to focus on issues pertaining to the western route of the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway and was told that Ahwatukee Foothills issues would be discussed “later.”

But the Arizona Department of Transportation has already submitted a draft environmental impact statement to the Federal Highway Administration, which addresses the Ahwatukee Foothill issues without the advisory team being let in on the results.

“We’ve been waiting for this discussion,” said Laurel Arndt, a member of the advisory team representing the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee.

And it raised the fundamental question, again, of why have an advisory team to solicit local input and help ADOT update the design of the freeway if ADOT has already completed the draft environmental impact statement, which answers the questions of how the freeway will be designed and built and what impact it will have.

“What’s the purpose of this committee? You already got your draft environmental impact statement,” wondered Sandy Bahr, a member of the advisory team representing the Arizona chapter of the Sierra Club.

But Mark Hollowell from ADOT said that public input, both from the advisory team and next year from the public at large, is important to shaping the final environmental impact statement.

“This isn’t a slam dunk – we really are soliciting input from the public,” he said.

The advisory team’s plan is that in the coming months it will study traffic, air quality, impacts of the freeway on South Mountain Park, along with how the freeway will affect flood plains, cultural resources and the visual resources of Ahwatukee Foothills.

Once the draft environmental impact statement is released, some time next year, the advisory team will then look more closely at how the proposed freeway impacts air quality before making a final recommendation on either to build or not build.

The final environmental impact statement will include the public and advisory team comments and will then go to the Maricopa Association of Governments, which approves all Valleywide transportation projects, before going to Washington for final approval.

Opponents point out that the original plans were drawn up in the early 1980s to connect Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills with a six-lane freeway heading west, through a corner of South Mountain Park and then north to reconnect with I-10 around 55th Avenue.

Since then opponents say development has exploded and that the freeway needs a new route to take into account growth in Pinal County and in the far west.

At the same time ADOT has widened the freeway's footprint so that just in Ahwatukee Foothills an estimated 255 homes would have to be demolished.

Supporters point to rapid growth in the Valley and say that the 25-mile freeway segment is needed or gridlock will freeze I-10 as well as surface streets in Laveen and the East Valley.

In 2005 voters approved a half-cent sales tax continuation in Maricopa County to fund transportation projects, including the Loop 202 that was budgeted at \$1.1 billion. But figures from ADOT in August show that the estimated cost of the freeway stands at \$1.6 billion, which doesn't include hidden costs involving as many as 63 low- to high-priority potentially hazardous material sites on the west of the project near a fuel storage facility the freeway will pass next to.

For more information, visit [www.southmountainfreeway.com](http://www.southmountainfreeway.com)

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